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AUTHOR Lester, Juliette N.; Perry, Nancy S.
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ABSTRACT

Recent efforts to improve education have led to a new look at assessment. As pedagogy has changed to focus on learner-centered education, the need to make assessment an integral, on-going part of instruction has become obvious. Concurrently, federal initiatives to promote educational reform have required the provision of career development opportunities and have demanded accountability in this area. The portfolio concept is one way to meet this challenge by giving students ownership of their work and standards by which they can be measured. States and local districts must define the career development standards they wish to implement, allow students the opportunity to take responsibility for their career development, offer the necessary career guidance and counseling to support student learning, and assess both the program and the individual to assure that the expected outcomes are being achieved. The portfolio provides the format for the process and documentation of career development while giving individuals and programs standards for assessment. (JBJ)

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Assessing Career Development with Portfolios

Juliette N. Lester and Nancy S. Perry

Overview

The assessment of career development is a relatively new concept. In general, ideas of appropriate methods for assessing student achievement and mastery of any set of competencies are shifting. Criterion-referenced tests, which measure performance relative to a specified set of standards or tasks, are gaining favor, for example, over norm-referenced tests, which measure how an examinee performed in relation to others. At the same time, support for internal accountability, that is, determining what is worth knowing and assuring that students know it, is increasing. One response to this has been an increased use of portfolios that provide a medium for assessing student work and invite them to become responsible partners in documenting their learning. Through portfolios, students compose a portrait of themselves as able learners, selecting and presenting evidence that they have met the learning standards for individual classes and for broader learning tasks (Wolf, LeMahieu & Eresh, 1992). A student portfolio may be described as "a purposeful collection of student work that tells the story of the student's efforts, progress, or achievement in a given area. This collection must include student participation in selection of portfolio content; the guidelines for selections; the criteria for judging merit; and evidence of student self-reflection" (Arter and Spandel, 1992, p.36).

As career development becomes an increasingly important component of educational systems, the issues of measurement and accountability are raised. This digest focuses on the use of portfolios in assessing career development.

Career Development Goals

In today's workplace, employment security is becoming "employability security" (Kanter, 1991, p.9) -- the knowledge that one has the competencies demanded in a global economy and the ability to expand and adjust those competencies as requirements change. The challenge of preparing our young people for this new workplace has generated legislative efforts to stimulate educational reform directed at creating "world class" education and a comprehensive system for helping American youth make a smooth transition from high school to productive, skilled employment and further learning. The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* establishes eight national education goals and two national councils -- one to stimulate the development of voluntary academic standards and the other to identify essential occupational skills. The *School to Work Opportunities Act of 1994* is a strategy to implement the purpose of the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, that is, helping all Americans to reach internationally competitive standards through educational reform.

Career development is a major component of the *School to Work Opportunities Act (STWOA)*. Career guidance and counseling, which are interventions in the career development process, are recognized as essential in helping students to choose their career (educational) pathway. Section 102 of the STWOA states that "The school-based component of a School-to-Work Opportunities program shall include ... career awareness and career exploration and counseling (beginning at the earliest possible age, but not later than the 7th grade) in order to help students who may be interested to identify, and select or reconsider, their interests, goals, and career majors, including those options that may not be traditional for their gender, race or ethnicity." The Act also provides grants to states to plan for and implement school-to-work opportunities systems.

Renewed interest in career development has led to an equal demand for accountability. This prompts several questions. What do we want our students to know and be able to do as a result of a career development process and how will we know that they have achieved it? This legislation has placed the onus on school systems to provide the programs to help students make informed career decisions, and to provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for their career development. How will they know they have achieved these outcomes?

Two major endeavors can help schools to meet the double need of accountability and assessment. First, state and professional associations, as well as national leaders, practitioners, and career development experts, collaborated to develop the National Career Development Guidelines (NOICC, 1989). The National Career Development Guidelines offer a comprehensive, competency-based approach to career development that states, educational institutions and other organizations can use in developing effective career guidance programs. The Guidelines offer the processes, content and structure for such programs. More importantly, they provide the standards or competencies for career development at four different

levels–elementary, middle/junior high, high school, and postsecondary/adult. The competencies fall within three areas of career development – self-knowledge, educational and occupational exploration, and career planning. The Guidelines, already being used in over 40 states as standards or as the basis for establishing career development standards, provide nationally validated competencies that can be used in assessment.

The second significant effort has been the work of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). In the Commission report, *What Work Requires of Schools* (U. S. Department of Labor, 1991), five areas of competencies based on a three-part foundation are delineated. Of the 36 specific skills or qualities noted, over half are commonly included in a career guidance program. This report validates the integration of career guidance and counseling into educational programs and supplies a complementary set of standards by which a career development process can be measured.

Assessment Through Portfolios

The essential criteria for measuring the accountability of a career guidance program are available. Since self-assessment and reflection are important to developing personal responsibility in career decision-making, a portfolio that sets standards and also allows for reflection emerges as the instrument of choice. Until now, most efforts to document career development have been through career planners. Career planners are usually the end product of a career development process and, as such, are appropriate for secondary education or higher but not for the student at the awareness or exploratory stages. They also do not typically provide for the self-reflection essential to an individual's ownership of the process.

Get A Life: Your Personal Planning Portfolio (ASCA, 1993), designed through collaboration between the American School Counselor Association and the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, is one instrument that sets standards and allows for self-reflection. The portfolio is divided into four sections – self-knowledge, life roles, educational development, and career exploration and planning. Each section contains competency files and personal files. The National Career Development Guidelines for the middle and high school levels are used as competencies for both program and individual assessment. Program planners can analyze the comprehensiveness of their programs by evaluating their activities in relation to the expected student outcomes contained in the Guidelines. Individuals can determine if they have met the career development competencies through the programs offered. Within the competency file, a sign-off ascertains the strategies and the date on which each competency was addressed. In some schools, students make the decision whether, in fact, the activity or strategy presented did help them to master the competency. The personal files are a set of guiding questions that help students to reflect on their learning. The portfolio is an organizational tool that allows the owners to collect information about themselves to use in making personal, educational and career decisions. At the same time, the students are introduced to the idea that the process is lifelong, and that they must become "career negotiators" (Bailyn, 1992), taking responsibility for their own development.

Summary and Conclusion

Recent efforts to improve education have led to a new look at assessment. As pedagogy has changed to focus on learner-centered education, the need to make assessment an integral, on-going part of instruction has become obvious. Concurrently, Federal initiatives to promote educational reform have required the provision of career development opportunities and have demanded accountability in this area. The portfolio concept is one way to meet this challenge by giving students ownership of theirwork and standards by which they can be measured. States and local districts must define the career development standards they wish to implement, allow students the opportunity to take responsibility for their career development, offer the necessary career guidance and counseling to support student learning, and assess both the program and the individual to assure that the expected outcomes are being achieved. The portfolio provides the format for the process and documentation of career development while giving individuals and programs standards for assessment.

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Juliette N. Lester is the Executive Director of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC).

Nancy S. Perry, Guidance Consultant for the Maine Department of Education, is currently serving as Career Development Specialist with NOICC.

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